

[Ida Allen]

15th. St.

West Durham, N. C.

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I. L. M.

IDA ALLEN

She seems hewn from rough granite, this woman who sits in her front room and talks while her slowly changing expression brings at long intervals a kindly, creeping smile to her ruddy face. Her features though definite and firm in outline have a roughness which makes one think the chiseler laid down his tools before the surface had been smoothed. Change and time have moved about her and brought age to her body, but her mind has remained impervious to change. The beliefs of her childhood are the mainstay of her old age.

A tiny light of learning come into her life as a child, and with creditable effort she clung to it and passed it on in such measure as she could to her own children.

I shall set down in her own words the story of Ida Allen as she told it to me the other day while I sat with her in her front room which contained a cheap settee, two chairs, a table, and a linoleum rug.

"I was born in Chatham County, the second of Sid Reagin's six children. Pa was a good man, always sober and a steady worker. He was thoughtful of Ma 2 and took the best care of her he knowed how. Ma was a weakly woman and Pa seen to it that she stayed in bed

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for four or five weeks after each one of her children was born. He had a doctor with her every time too, and not all poor folks in them days had doctors.

“Before going to the field of a morning at such times when Ma was ailing, he'd lift her outa bed and set her in a chair. When she got weary of settin' I'd go and call Pa, and he'd come and put her in the bed agin.

“Before he was married Pa had fought to help free the colored people. He never believed that slavery was right and it taint. Pa never had much of a chance himself and he never learned to write his name. For generations we've been poor people and before me there was none in the family could read. Take Pa though; he'd been glad of a little schoolin' if there'd been any way for him to get it. I'll tell you why I know in a minute.

“Pa sent me to a four month's school that cost him a dollar a month. They wasn't free schools in them days and only a few got learning. But it was in me to learn more then I could get in them four months.

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We lived on Stroud's place then and Mrs. Stroud was my Sunday school teacher. She seen how well I done my Sundry school lesson and she took to havin' me come to her house for school lessons. I got to where I could do fair readin' and writin' and figurin'. They was plenty in them days that got all the schoolin' they ever had from Sundry school teachers that was willin' to teach them for nothin'.

“Now comin' back to Pa and the reason I think he'd been proud of a little learning. I've never knowed a person that loved to hear readin' more than him. I got to where I could read any part of the Bible with fair understandin', and of a night after he'd gone to bed, tired out from a hard day's work, I'd set and read to him by the light of a light'ood knot. He loved most of all to hear about the kings of Israel.

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"They wasn't any foolishness atall about Pa and his younguns was never seen at no sort of party. He said a party was a place where young folks got in trouble and he was goin' to help us stay outa trouble. Till this day I ain't never been to no party and to no picture show neither. ("Folks seem awful careless about love in these times to me. It taint a good thing for young girls to read these love story magazines and such like. Hit 4 puts ideas in they heads that's got no business there. I've never read no love story of no kind. Love ain't nothin' to be trifled with, and as for goin' with first one and then the other I think its a pure sin.

"They was one boy that come courtin' me and I married him. Bob Allen and me played together when we was children, and then after we was both growed up he took to walkin' home with me from Sunday School of a Sunday. He was twenty-three and I was twenty when we got married. Bob was a wage hand then, gettin' twenty-dollars a month. He kept on at that job and I worked such little patches as I could get. When the children come along and was big enough to work I sometimes raised two bales of cotton a year. We had our own hogs and a cow, and we lived right well.

"Then Bob's health give away. He took down with the consumption and he knowed he didn't have long to live. He said that me and the children couldn't make a living on the farm and he wanted to move to the cotton mill where the children could take care of theyselves. They worked children in the mills them days. You know, little ones not more then nine or / ten year old.

"We moved to Carrboro and the children went to work. They never made much but put together it was 5 enough to feed us. Then I took in washin' for awhile till I got a chance to go to work in the mill. In less than two years Bob had wasted away with the consumption and died. We was a long time payin' for his buryin'.)

"Eighteen year ago we moved to Durham. We worked some at East Durham and then got on here at West Durham.

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“My children are all married now with families of they own — all except Louise. Last week she drew \$9 from the mill and it's like that most times. They send her out for restin' pretty near a day out of every week and she don't have a chance to draw full pay. Me and her and my son's child live on that. My son Ned was killed on the railroad and he left his wife with five children. I took Annie, next to the youngest, to raise and since they ain't no way for me to make money the burden falls to Louise.

“I've got one son making \$16 a week when he don't have to rest none but he's got six children to support outa that. His daughter Ella had to be operated on for the appendicitis in June and he's still payin' on her doctor's bill.

“They's not a child I've got that's really able to take care of me. (I put in for the old age pension, and after a long time it started comin' and come three 6 months. Now I don't get it no more. If I had education enough to put my reasonin' down on paper, I'd write a letter to Governor Hoey and explain to his that I'm almost compelled to have that \$10 a month if I keep on livin'. None of my children can write it for me either because they ain't got no more learnin' than me.) It was never so I could send them to school much, and most of what they know is what I learnt 'em myself. I've not got one that caint read and write some though.

“Old ones caint get jobs no more, you know. I'm seventy-two. Maybe if they caint get it straightened out about the old age pension they'll pass a law for doin' away with us old ones that's in the way. (Ay, Lord, its a queer sort of world.”)